

Get Ready for the Next Fire Season Now

Signe Leirfallom, Community Forester

Despite a snowy winter and wet spring, fire season hit western Montana hard in 2017. Wildfire is inevitable in Montana. Our forests are adapted to fire, and our climate is conducive to it. In this challenging fire season, landowners and homeowners who live in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) are reminded that we need to take responsibility in preparing our property for wildfire. It is the least we can do to help the firefighters and fire managers who work so hard and often risk their lives to protect it.

The WUI is where the forest and community meet. It is a pleasant place to live, but comes



CREDIT JEFF HARRIS

Former District Ranger Tim Love recalls events of the 2007 Jocko Lakes Fire at CRC's June 25 Event.

Events



CRC Upcoming Events

Thursday, August 31, 7 pm, Seeley Lake Historical Barn

Pure Montana Tales presents:

How Well Do You Know Your Montana Moose?

with FWP Biologist Nick deCesare
Free. Everyone Welcome.

with risk. While wildfires are driven by a combination of weather, fuels and topography, they are often unpredictable. Weather events may change the trajectory of a fire in the matter of a few minutes. Under these circumstances, firefighters may not be able to safely defend homes against fire. However, there are numerous resources available to landowners who wish to prepare their property ahead of time, giving firefighters the best and safest chance.

The Clearwater Resource Council offers grants to landowners who choose to thin and remove heavy forest fuels from their property. The grant generally pays up to 50% of the total project cost. Wood products that come off the property as part of the project can often reduce the landowner's cost significantly. Fuel reduction will not necessarily "stop" a fire, but it will often bring the fire to the ground, which

creates safe "defensible space" for firefighters to work, reduces mortality in the remaining trees and can help protect a home.

Thinning alone will not save your home. Homes are built with combustible materials that can ignite from embers or sparks, regardless of whether the surrounding forest is thinned. The MT DNRC and/or local fire departments offer free home assessments that will give homeowners valuable information and recommend action items to make their homes more fire-resistant. Call Clearwater Unit at 406-244-5857 to take advantage of this opportunity.

When the smoke finally clears in Seeley, be proactive not complacent. Use the fall, winter and spring months to get your home and property ready for the next fire. It will come. Contact CRC for more information: signe@crcmt.org, 406-546-4467.

The Latest on the Invasive Mussels

by Joann Wallenburn, Aquatics Director

Now that the ice is off the lakes and we are well into fire season, I'd like to bring you up to date on what's happening with the invasive mussels. Clearwater Resource Council (CRC), Blackfoot Challenge (BC) and Swan Valley Connections (SVC) have their monitoring programs in full swing, collecting the fourth of six rounds of samples. Together, we are sampling Alva, Inez, Seeley, Salmon, Placid, Big Sky Browns, Coopers, Upsata, Swan, Van, Holland and Lindbergh lakes. Sample results through the first two rounds of samples are all negative.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sent a dive team to Tiber Reservoir. Since the veligers (juvenile mussels) can't swim against the current, they must go with the flow. The flow in Tiber is out of the dam. The divers spent days examining the dam walls, made up of large rocks with lots of hidey-holes for the mussels, and found nothing. All microscopy samples taken so far this year have been negative. The same is true with microscopy samples for Canyon Ferry. This is all good news, but leaves us scratching our heads. The positive results from last year on Tiber Reservoir are indisputable. Not all introductions become full-fledged invasions. It will take 5 years of negative findings to determine that the waters are mussel-free.

New this year is the presence of roving inspectors at area boat launches, in addition to the inspection station at Clearwater Junction. Between the 3 organizations, we have funding for 140 hours per week of roving inspectors. This effort helps 'catch' to boats that should have been inspected and weren't and helps a lot with outreach and education. So far, the public has been courteous and supportive of these extra measures.

Many of you may wonder about the AIS risk from the scooper planes and dipping helicopters that are fighting the fire. All scooper planes are decontaminated before coming 'on incident'. DNRC has east of the divide and west of the divide buckets for the helicopters that are working fires statewide. Even during this critical event, the agencies are taking preventive measures. We should do the



same in our daily lives.

Clean, Drain, Dry. Clean your watercraft and recreational gear of all visible mud and vegetation. Drain motor intakes, ballast tanks, live wells – and container that holds water. Pull your plug and drain the bilge. Dispose of bait in the trash can, not the lake. Dry your watercraft and equipment thoroughly before going to a different lake. Always assume there's something in the lake you are leaving that is bad for the lake you are going to next. Don't move it from one lake to another. The Clearwater Chain-of-Lakes is beautiful and we are lucky to be able to recreate here. Because the lakes are interconnected, what gets into one will get into all the others downstream. Let's all be extra careful and keep our lakes free of unwanted plants and animals, especially these awful mussels.

For additional information or to sign up to help, contact me at 210-8453 or joann@crcmt.org

Trails Survey Gets Great Response

Cathy Kahnle, CRC Executive Director

The Seeley Lake Trails Project is moving forward making real headway on the public engagement portion of our trail process. In February we started publicizing and sending out detailed surveys about what this community (and its visitors) want to see in a trails system. The survey period closed on July 21 and it looks like we really hit a home run with the community, receiving 328 detailed survey responses. Thank you! The responses were amazingly detailed and helpful. People took the time to really ponder the issues and provide substantive input. The survey addressed everything from what the community wants its future economy to look like, to what trails people like and use most, and what changes to the trail system are needed. Some terrific ideas were submitted!

We are in the process of evaluating the survey responses and identifying all potential trails that have been suggested. Once we have the final list, we will start analyzing each trail proposal so that the public can see how each trail proposal looks when vetted for quality, feasibility, liability, partnerships, economic impact, sustainability, environmental impact, education and tribal/cultural issues.

There were many ideas submitted that aren't "trails per se" but are still wonderful ways to maximize or expand the existing system. We will provide those ideas, the survey results, and the individual trail analyses to the public at a second Public Trails Meeting later this year. Happy trails!